

# For older adults, serious depression symptoms increase risk for stroke and heart disease

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Depression and its symptoms increase as people age, and have been linked to heart disease and stroke in both middle-aged and older adults. But whether depression and its symptoms are risk factors for these two dangerous conditions has been unclear.

In a new study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, [researchers](#) set out to learn more about whether depression or its symptoms affect heart disease and stroke in older adults.

The researchers studied 7,313 older adults selected from the election rolls of three large French cities between 1999 and 2001. None of the participants had a history of heart disease, stroke, or dementia at the start of the study. Researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants when the study began, and checked them again three times—two years, four years, and seven years after their initial interview. In addition, researchers tested the participants' mental health status, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels, and asked them questions about medical history and medications. In addition, the researchers determined whether or not the participants had symptoms of depression.

At the beginning of the study, nearly 30 percent of the women and 15 percent of the men (23 percent of all participants in total) had high levels of [depressive symptoms](#). The researchers discovered that about 40 percent of people with high levels of depressive symptoms "recovered"

and the same amount of people developed new depression symptoms at each follow-up visit. During all study visits, fewer than 10 percent of the [participants](#) were taking medications for depression.

The researchers discovered that adults 65-years-old and older who had high levels of depressive symptoms on one, two, three, or four occasions during the study had 15 percent, 32 percent, 52 percent, and 75 percent greater risk, respectively, for experiencing heart disease or stroke events over the 10 years of the study. As a result, the researchers concluded that depression could be a risk factor for [heart disease](#) or stroke. They suggested that physicians pay close attention to symptoms of [depression](#) in [older adults](#) under care.

**More information:** "High Level of Depressive Symptoms at Repeated Study Visits and the Risk of Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke over 10 Years in Older Adults: The Three-City Study."  
[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ... 1/jgs.13872/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jgs.13872/abstract)

Provided by American Geriatrics Society

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